



## Rules of Debate

One of the matters that fall under the heading of Induction is procedure, and to this there is apt to be a common-sense or spontaneous response, which is nevertheless wrong.

There are always people who think that the Rules of Debate, or Rules of Order, or Procedure of Meetings, are an unnecessary obstruction. Such people are similar to the advocates of “Structurelessness” that we read about in the last part of this course of Induction.

But in fact, the “[Rules of Order](#)”, which go under many different names, are of great assistance. Far from inhibiting, these rules set people free.

Without them, a lot of business would be simply impossible.

The US book “[Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised](#)” puts it like this:

*“The application of parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member’s opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying complexity in a minimum amount of time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned division of opinion.”*

As can be seen from this quotation, “Robert’s Rules” is quite verbose. But you can get the idea. This is a way to get business done. For this reason, the Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings are crucial to the democracy of mass organisations, just as much as they are crucial for parliaments and municipalities, and for board meetings or shareholders’ meetings of companies and co-operatives.

The South African Communist Party has no given Rules of Debate or Standing Orders. Unfortunately this does not prevent people from claiming “Points of Order”. A remedy and rescue from such chaotic “Points of Order” would be the adoption of an authority, of which there are many to choose from. But the problem of people not knowing the rules would remain.

Rules are only effective to the extent that they are understood in common by the members of any particular gathering, and enforced by these members on each other through their servant, the chairperson. Hence the problem becomes one of

conscientising people, so as to develop a common culture or collective understanding of these rules and procedures.

Wal Hannington was well known as a communist leader of the unemployed workers' movement in Britain in the 1930s. Our summary of the Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings from his 1950 booklet "Mr Chairman" is attached.

Hannington wrote: "The Chairman is there to guide the meeting, not to boss it." This is the most valuable message in his book. To repeat, with a different emphasis, what was said at the beginning: The Rules of Debate and the Procedures of Meetings are only justified to the extent that they liberate the people present in a meeting. They tend to become useless, or possibly worse than useless, when they are imposed as a burden, or used as an obstruction.

The point is not for the Chairperson to "keep order", or for individuals to be bullied down with "points of order". The Chairperson serves the meeting, and the meeting needs to know how to guide the Chairperson.

Everything works best when everybody is familiar with the common Rules of Debate.

- The above is to introduce an original reading-text: [Hannington, Rules of Debate and Procedures of Meetings](#).
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